

Chap. 12 of 14
(18-24.)

Sturtevant

on buying papers
in India

1868

XX.—*On the Custom of Burying and Burning Alive of Lepers in India.* By Dr. ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL.

[Read June 9th, 1868.]

I BEG leave to bring to the notice of the Society that two new and very savage rites, which are still practised in Rajpootana and other parts of India, have only now been brought to light, notwithstanding the very long period of our intimate acquaintance with the Hindoos, and the great number of acute observers and eminent men who have written on their habits and customs. One is the burying alive of persons afflicted with leprosy; the other—if possible still more inhuman—is the burning alive of the same objects of commiseration.

The following notices of these horrid practices are from one of the Indian journals:—

An Inhuman Rite still Practised.—Samadh—signifying burying alive—is not so familiar a word as suttee, thuggee, or infanticide, but it appears that this kind of self-immolation up to this day prevails in some of the Rajpootana states. And it has been reported as not unknown even in Cashmere. In a letter, dated so late as April 2, the Governor-General's agent for those states observes that, the better he becomes acquainted with the province entrusted to his political supervision, the more he perceives that the state of society in all the southern and western portion of it is beyond measure backward and rude. Not only do we know but little of what transpires, but the chiefs themselves have neither information nor power of control in their own territories. Three samadhs are reported as having occurred during the past year; and a record is also given of nine cases extending over six years, with reference to which several depositions were taken. These seem all to have occurred in the Serohi and Marwar states, and were confined entirely to lepers: who when wasted with disease prefer death to an existence in which life is a burden, and their very persons objects of loathing to themselves and their relatives. The circumstances are all very similar. A poor suffering wretch, influenced perhaps by priests, by relatives glad to get rid of him, and by consciousness of his own noxious condition, expresses a desire to bury himself alive. The relatives for two or three days remonstrate and endeavour to dissuade, but he is firm; some of the nearest relatives then get up a procession, dig a pit, the

doomed man voluntarily enters it, his friends heap up and beat down the soil, and the whole of the villagers witness the sacrifice. A few days subsequently the mob visits the afflicted house, opium water is drunk, and the taint is removed. The rite, inhuman as it is, seems to have been long practised; nothing is hidden or denied, those concerned saying that it is the established custom of the country. Past offences of this character can scarcely be punished, but there is not the least doubt that the abolition of samadh will be as readily and generally accepted as the forbiddance of suttee. The rulers of Marwar and Serohi have been addressed on the subject, and both have now proclaimed any connivance in the rite a criminal offence punishable with ten years' imprisonment.

Burying Alive.—The *Friend of India* comments on the report of the political agent at Serohi regarding the crime of *samadh*, or burying alive, as practised in Rajpootana. He is possibly not aware that the barbarous practice still lingers in our own provinces. The north-west police report for 1866 describes a case of *samadh* which occurred in that year in the Jounpore district. The crime, however, in that instance was perpetrated "with a difference." The victim, a leper, Purein Singh, was placed in a hole seven feet deep, and there *burnt to death*. The excavated earth was then piled over his remains. The report of the district superintendent of police explains this variation of treatment by the Hindoo superstition, that if the leprous member of a family be *burnt to death*, the *whole family* will be safe from the dreadful disease. In this Jounpore case it was said that Purein Singh encountered his terrible death quite voluntarily. Nevertheless seven aiders and abettors were committed to the Sessions under sections 302 and 306 of the Penal Code.—*Pioneer.*







